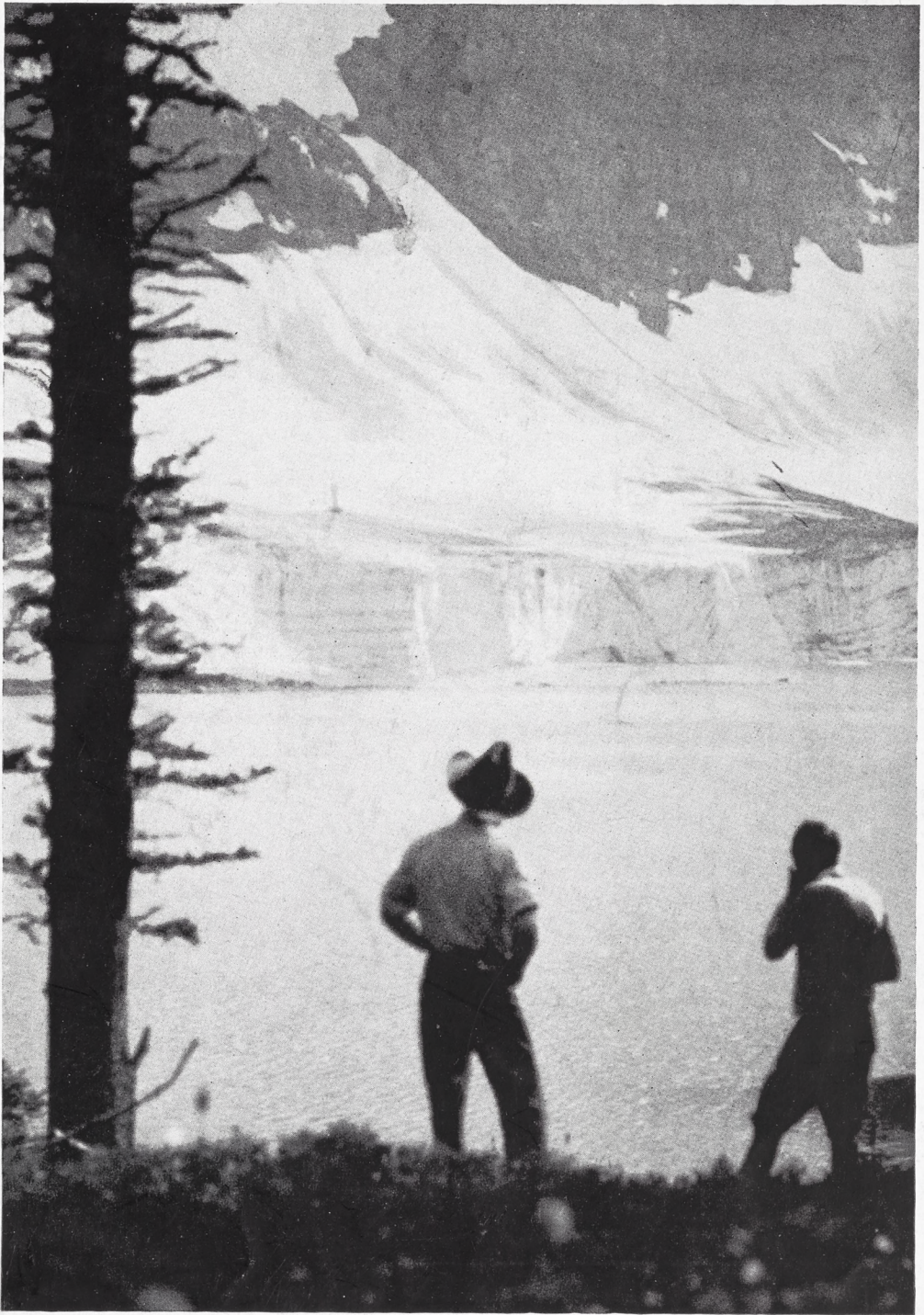


The Sky Line Trail

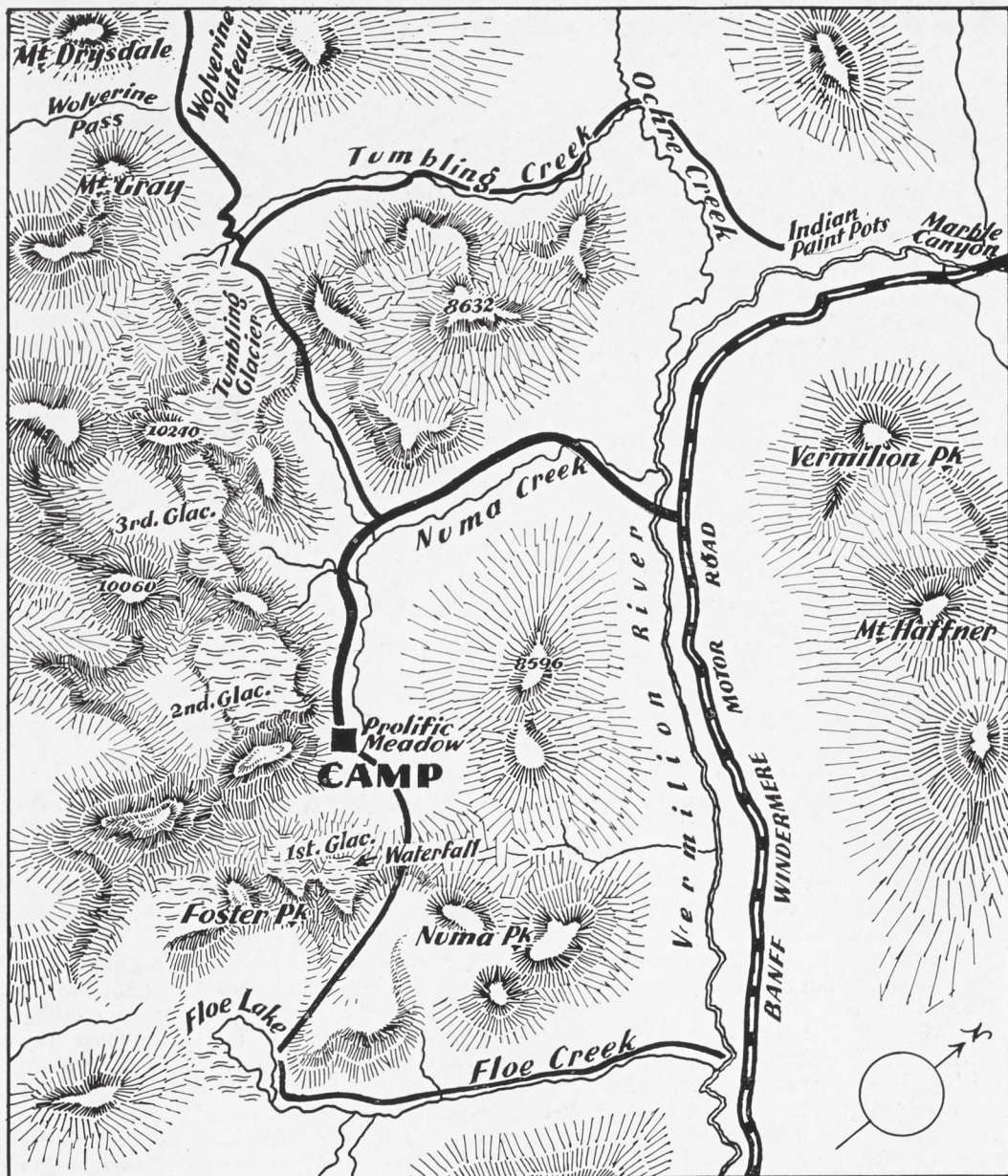


VOL. VIII No. 31
JUNE 1941



Floe Lake in Kootenay Park

Printed in Canada.



SKY LINE TRAIL CAMP..1941

The Camp will be held at Prolific Meadow, near the source of Numa Creek in Kootenay Park and will be timed for the first week-end in August, namely Friday August 1st to Monday August 4th. Trail Hikers will be conveyed by bus early in the morning of August 1st from Banff with their duffle, which will be carried by pack pony to the camp. Rate, including transportation by bus from Banff to the trail and return, conveyance of duffle to and from the camp and meals, and tent accommodation at the camp for the four days, will be \$20.00.

Reservations should be sent now either to Dan McCowan, Banff, Alberta,
or to
J. M. GIBBON — Room 318, Windsor Station, Montreal.



Vermilion Range, Kootenay Park, at Floe Lake.

Numa Creek And Snow Basin — Kootenay Park

Through the courtesy of Mr. J. M. Wardle, Director of the Surveys and Engineering Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, we have received the following memorandum covering the first surveys of the terrain through which we plan to hike this summer.

"Seventeen years ago Major A. I. Robertson, B.C.L.S., made a reconnaissance for the Federal Department of the Interior of "Roaring Creek" Valley, now known as Numa Creek, for the purpose of determining what scenic advantages it afforded and just where a trail might best be built. Major Robertson first investigated the old trail leading down the west bank of the Vermilion River and, in addition to finding this trail, found evidence of a trail leading from Vermilion River valley via Numa Creek to Wolverine Pass. He also found an old trail, possibly a hunting trail, leading from the upper waters of Numa Creek over a pass towards Floe Lake and Floe Creek valley. It is along the route of these old trails that the Sky-line Trail Hikers will follow in their 1941 outing.

"The descriptions that follow and the copy of the map are taken from Major Robertson's report of 1924:

"The old trail southerly along the west bank of the Vermilion River crosses Numa Creek about 1,000 feet up from the Vermilion River but this was a ford for horses and would not be a feasible crossing for tourist travel since the

latter coincides with the period of highest water on these mountain streams. One-half mile further upstream the creek runs in one channel and is about 40 feet wide. A pack bridge could be put in here fairly cheaply. Some switch-backing would be required to reach this crossing.

"About one-quarter of a mile above this crossing the benches on each side of "Roaring Creek" (Numa Creek) close in and the Creek runs in a gulch with steep sides. Its course as followed from the Vermilion had been north-westerly, but from the narrowest part of this gulch it curves into the range, and from here to its head leads more or less westerly. At the change of direction a slide has come down on the north side and its final slope down to waterlevel is steep. The shale clay of which the slide is composed has been softened by seepages from the springs above.

"For this reason I recommend that any trail built up this creek should follow well up on the northern bench and should cross this slide at the top of the clay bank, where the ground is dry and comparatively flat.

"After crossing above this slide a belt of heavier

timber is entered. Spruce predominates and reaches a diameter of about 18 inches. A grade down to the creek bed would have to be built here to avoid a series of steep shale cliffs which extend down to the bank of the stream.

"From this point on up the creek water-grade can be followed practically all the way. Snow slides and mud slides have from time to time shouldered the creek from one side of its narrow valley to another, with the result that there are hundreds of feet at a stretch of old gravel bars which are well above present highwater level, and covered with willow and small spruce saplings, and which, when these are brushed out will furnish excellent going for shod horses. These bars will materially lower the average cost of a trail. Where the bars fail, the trail can be cut a few feet up on the side hill, and construction will not be costly, for the distances in the timber will be short, and the timber itself is of comparatively insignificant size.

"In the three or four places where shale and clay slides have come down, while construction is of the simplest, it will probably be necessary to send out a couple of men each spring to regrade portions of the trail which may have slid.

"About a mile and a half from the mouth of "Roaring Creek" a small stream has torn for itself a deep gulch down the mountainside from the north. It was, of course, low when I saw it, but judging from appearances it must be a hurrying little stream in the height of summer. It is, however, confined in this narrow gulch, and a log or two thrown across will supply all the bridging required.

"From this creek upstream to the entrance to

the "Snow Basin" itself the nature of the banks does not alter. It is the same alternation of old gravel bars on the creek bottom and shale slides and strips of spruce timber on the sidehill. One or two slides have come down on both sides of the creek towards its head, and while they are for the most part covered with the usual willow and creeping alder, they would furnish "picking" for a few cayuses over-night. Just inside the basin the creek forks, one branch swinging northerly and the other southerly. This south fork comes down a long and comparatively shallow valley, which appears to head under a ridge which connects the shoulder of Foster Peak with that of Roaring Mountain. A trail route might be found to the top of this ridge, from which I would anticipate little difficulty in dropping down on to the head of 'Floe Creek.'

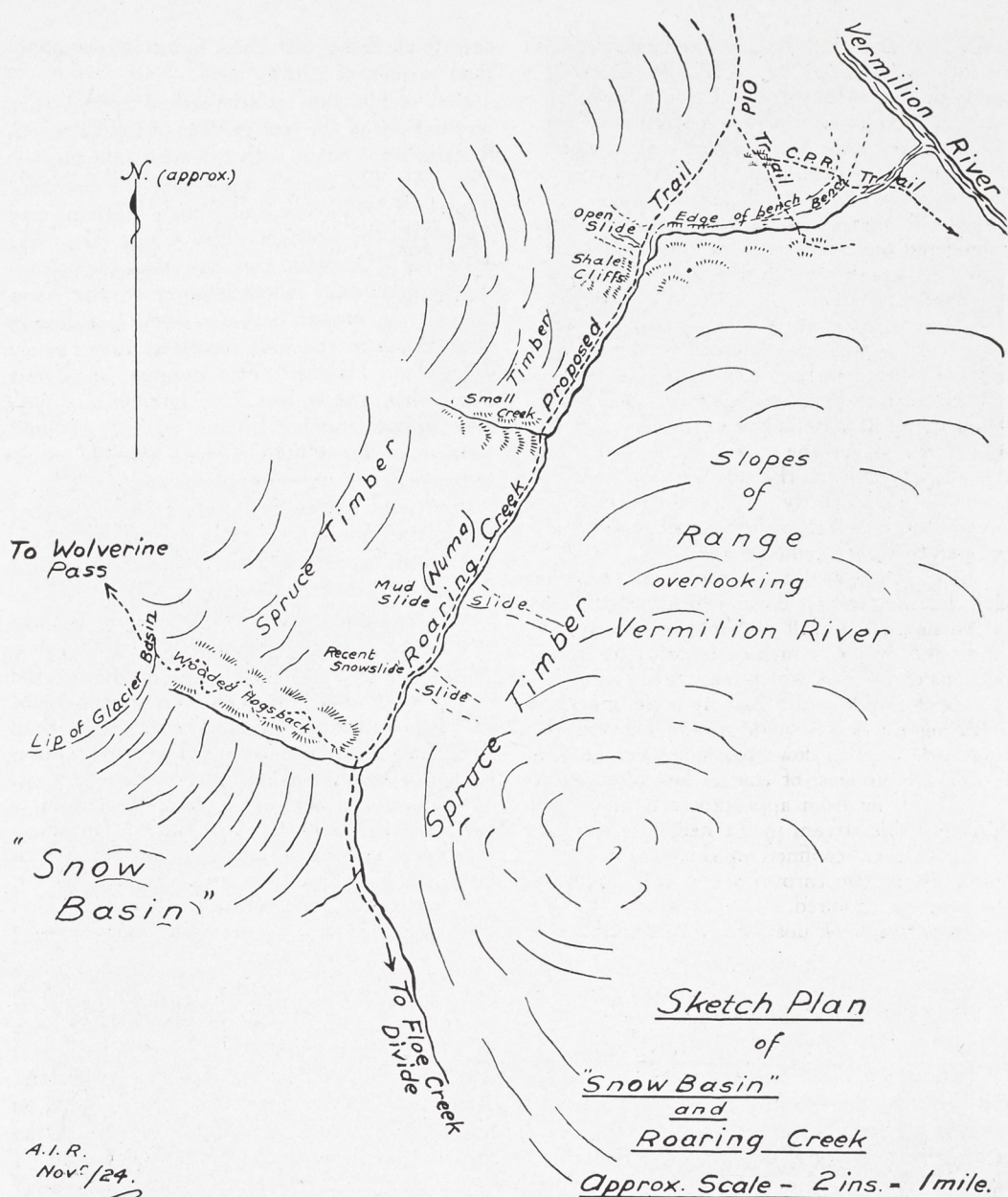
"The country round the skirts of Foster Peak looks well worth opening up, for I imagine that it will be found to be the wildest tract in the whole Vermilion range.

"The ascent from the forks of 'Roaring Creek' to the summit of the 'Floe Creek' divide I would guess at about twenty-five hundred feet. With regard to the north fork of the creek I was disappointed that snow flurries eddying in over the higher basin to the northwest made it impossible to get an accurate idea of the country in that direction, and even more so that time did not allow of making a fly-camp in the main basin and exploring the possibilities of getting a trail up a wooded hogsback which leads to the lip of the high level basin to the right. This is a glacier basin. The westerly edge of the glacier is visible from below, and some maps show a



Photo by Allan Carscallen

Alpine prairies below the cliffs of the Vermilion Range are grazing ground for elk—three of whom may be seen in the centre of this picture.



glacier somewhere up there. If a trail up to this basin is feasible, it would be most interesting to find out whether it would be possible to continue it northerly to cut the main trail across the Wolverine Pass. If such a route were found practicable, and the connection with 'Floe Creek' to which I have already alluded were established, I am inclined to think that this route would become in time the favoured tourist route from the Lake Louise country to the lower Vermilion. "It may have been remarked that I have made no reference to the south bank of 'Roaring Creek,' and I should perhaps point out here that I

think that the north banks of all these east and west creeks should carry the trails. Even on the north bank, where the sun can get at it, the snow will lie long in the spring, particularly in the thick spruce timber.

"There is nothing at all remarkable in a scenic way about this creek. It is merely a cheerful noisy little burn, tumbling over itself to get out into the world.

"The 'Snow Basin' itself is well worth making accessible to tourists if only for the presence of the glacier basin to the north and the rugged country away to the south towards 'Foster Peak'."



Photo by Nicolas Morant
Dan McCowan on the look out for wild flowers.

Shrubs and Plants at Floe Lake and on Assiniboine Plateau

by DAN McCOWAN, F. Z. S.

*Author of "A NATURALIST IN CANADA" an attractive book
 recently published by the MacMillan Company - Toronto*

Often during winter months when rude winds and whirling snowstorms sweep through city canyons one may find ready escape by retracing in fancy the routes of bygone Trail Rides and Sky Line Hikes. In course of such journeyings I recall that somewhere in Ice River Valley contented Moose plash leisurely through reedy sloughs — that Marsh Hawks course beautifully above the grassy slopes of Skoki — that on Aylmer Pass, if memory serves me right, a flock of fearless Mountain Sheep grazes peacefully on a sunlit meadow — that high above Shadow Lake, on the bastions of Mount Ball, a herd of snow white Goats continues to play steeplejack tag on the face of a dizzy precipice — that at Lake McArthur sentinel Marmots pipe shrill warning through an otherwise silent glen and that in Little Yoho Valley a Sandpiper makes plaintive

outcry at being disturbed by a berry picking Bear in quest of a fruity meal.

Best of all, most clearly etched perhaps, are recollections of the roof gardens of the Canadian Rockies resplendent with colourful wild flowers. You may, like myself, remember the beautiful display of Heliotrope and Rough Fleabane and Arnica on the uplands where Ghost River has its source. Or again, you may recall the splendour of Mountain Rhododendron on the Twin Lakes trail, or the barbaric colours of Indian Paint Brush on the wide moorland above lonely Scarab and Haiduk. This summer, at Mount Assiniboine and in the Floe Lake region, you may add still further to your treasure of floral memories because both of these splendid scenic areas are rich in variety of plants and shrubs.

Prominent amongst flowering shrubs rooted by the trail side is Cinquefoil, a small yet attractive bush covered with golden buttercups throughout the entire summer. Silver Willow, sometimes called Wolf Willow, is also widely distributed in the Rockies where, in June, it is exceedingly fragrant. By the end of July the berries will be full formed on these silvery shrubs affording, although dry and mealy, much food to Grouse and other birds. The small brown seeds threaded on fine drawn sinew are still worn as necklaces by Indian women native to this part of the country. It is not generally known that Silver Willow, growing at high altitudes and in the near neighbourhood of great glaciers, is actually a species of Olive.

By the time that you saddle your horse for the Trail Ride or shoulder your rucksack for the Sky Line Camp there should be mush ripe fruit on the shrubs known as Saskatoon or Service Berry. Plucked and eaten by the trail side this is a truly delicious wild fruit. The largest and most succulent berries I have tasted were on heavily laden bushes near Starbird Ranch on the trail to the Lake of the Hanging Glaciers. I remember that both James Brewster and myself ate of them excessively and presently were prostrate from what could best be described as a surfeit of Saskatoons.

On nearly all moist hillsides you can hardly miss seeing Hellebore a large green-flowered plant that in leaf looks like tobacco. Although native to the region this tall stout plant has not yet adapted itself to life on high Alpine meadows. In such places it is not unusual to see acres of Hellebore mowed down in mid-August by the sickle of Jack Frost. It is a somewhat remarkable circumstance that while Wapiti or American Elk eat Hellebore with impunity, horses may be

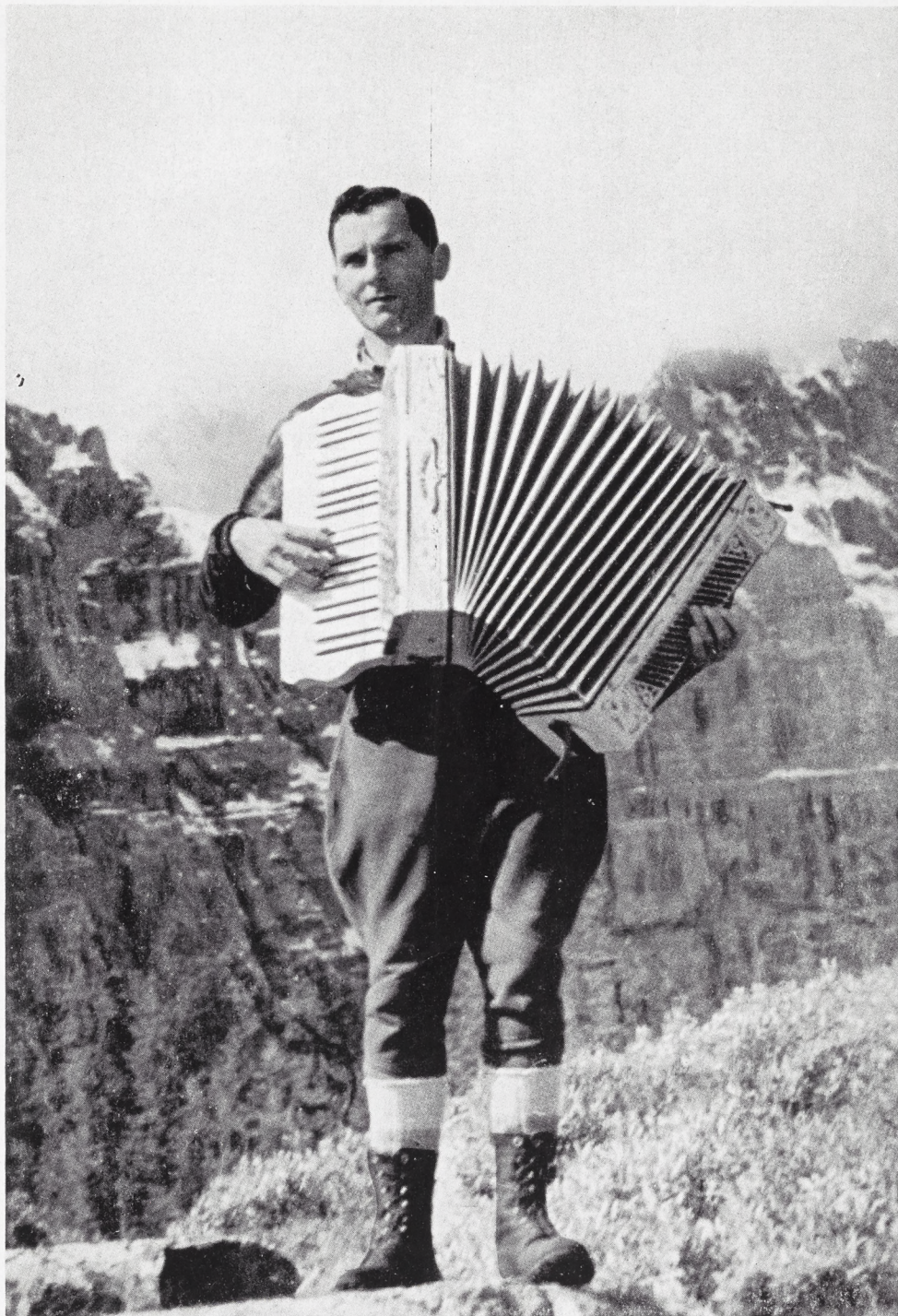


Photo by Nicolas Morant

Allan Crawford — Official Musician to the Sky Line Trail Hikers.



M' Coun's Gentian.



Mountain Rhododendron.



Columbine.



Silver Willow.



Arnica.



Saxifrage.

Shrubs and Plants at



Bistort.



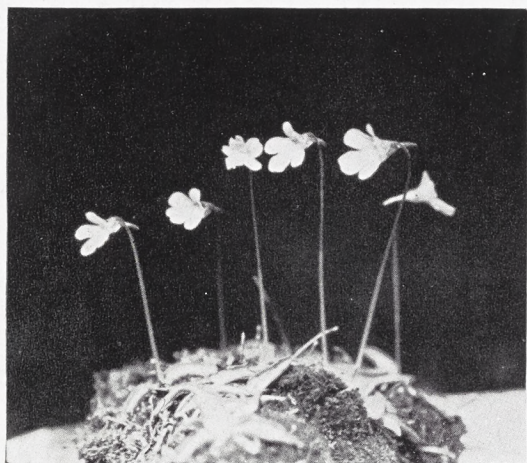
Glutinous Asphodel.



White Moccasin.



Saskatoon or Service Berry.



Butterwort.



Cow Parsnip.

fatally poisoned from partaking of even a small quantity of the foliage. I sometimes think that Pack Horses deliberately eat it for spite. Cow Parsnip is another of the outstanding giant plants common throughout a large section of the Rockies. In favourable locations it may grow to a height of seven feet and everywhere has a rather offensive odour. This, although unpleasant to mankind, serves to attract large numbers of insect customers of carrion tastes.

Wherever you sit down to rest by the side of a mountain trail your cushion will, in all probability, be of Kinnikinnick or Bearberry, a lowly shrub which carpets an immense area of hillside and woodland. It is a trailing evergreen with leaves similar to those on Boxwood. The flowers are small pink and white bells, the fruit when ripe is bright red in colour, not easily overlooked by hordes of hungry birds which often are almost entirely dependent on this shrub for food. The leaves, when dried, may be used as a substitute for smoking tobacco but you won't think much of it.

On the high moors around Assiniboine several varieties of Gentian are to be found, in fact plants of this species are common throughout the Rockies. Of these the Northern Gentian is most common and McCouns Gentian most rare. All are noted for extreme bitter properties developed, as in the acrid Buttercup, to protect the plants from grazing animals. Harebells, growing in profusion by all trailsides, also abound in a bitter milky juice which likewise renders the plants unpalatable to the several kinds of deer native to the Western Mountains.

Some of the most interesting plants rooted in the Rockies may readily be overlooked by Trail Riders and even by persons traveling on foot. Either the bloom is unattractive, (I dare not say insignificant), or else the odour has but small appeal to mankind. Amongst such is Asphodel, which clothed the meadows of Elysium and which in the Canadian Rockies might easily be mistaken for a species of Rush. This plant was formerly victimised by ants which freely climbed the stalks and got at the nectar without hindrance. Now Asphodel has effectually put a stop to the larceny of the porch climbers by coating each stem with a viscid substance. As a result this particular kind of Asphodel has been given the distinguishing surname of Glutinous.

Where Asphodel grows there too one may expect to find another hum-drum sort of a plant called Bistort. It is really quite an exciting kind of growth, when once you have become acquainted with its curious method of propaga-

tion. In form the plant is somewhat like the seed stalk of Plantain with numerous tiny white florets grouped around each parent stem. In due course these florets develop into miniature Bistorts which soon are rudely weaned by autumn winds and widely scattered to find new footholds for themselves. Because Bistort perpetuates itself in this unusual fashion, the plant is said to be Viviparous.

On the moors of Wolverine Plateau, by the shores of Floe Lake and Rock Island Lake and in Wonder Pass you will be gladdened by a fine display of Heath and of False Heather. Along Bryant Creek trail there is usually an abundance of Great Willow Herb or Fireweed, the mashed roots of which, if necessary, may be fashioned into an exceedingly tenacious poultice. On rocky crags and ledges near Prolific Meadow you may confidently look for several kinds of Saxifrage as well as for Alpine Arnica and a Forget-me-not of Wedgewood blue. By the margin of Lake Magog there is a splendid array of Purple Phacelia, nowhere else in the Rockies have I seen such large spikes of bloom on this kind of plant. Throughout the forested area between Whiteman Pass and Spray Lakes one may discover at least three varieties of Wintergreen and several kinds of Orchids. The White Mocassin, largest of the orchids in this neighbourhood, is fond of moist soil under willows on the banks of a mountain stream. Its ivory blooms are singularly beautiful. Rooted in sour soggy swamps in all parts of the Canadian Rockies is the one carnivorous plant native to the region — Butterwort. It bears a rather handsome flowers like that on the purple Violet and has sticky leaves in which insects become entangled and are destroyed. The acid fluid which so effectually detains and dissolves the luckless victims has long been used in Lapland for the purpose of crudding milk. While this strange plant depends mainly on insects for its welfare it is also capable of digesting seeds, pollen and even leaves of other plants.

In this bulletin there is not enough space to even list the flowers and shrubs and trees growing at Floe Lake and on the lofty plateau around Mount Assiniboine. On the forthcoming Trail Ride or at the Sky Line Hike Camp you will however have ample opportunity to become acquainted with many of the colourful wild flowers which embroider the upland meadows. Then, when winter comes and you sit by the fireside you may have clear vision of the far off peaceful hills, of Columbinas nodding by the winding trails, of Larkspur flying blue banners on sunlit slopes and of the silken plumes of Dryas unfurled on the clean shingle of mountain streams.



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Whereas _____ has qualified for
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*Members holding qualification of 50 miles and upwards
may compound their paid and future dues by payment
of \$10.00 which shall absolve them from further payment
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